



Make me feel like I am home again

MA Thesis | Liang Xiaohan

Make me feel like I am home again

A qualitative study of student housing in the Greater Helsinki

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Liang Xiaohan

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Abstract

Student housing projects are of rising attention by scholars and designers alike; they seek to explore the considerable and strategic approaches to creating a home-like living environment for the university students. Similarly, this research focuses on the feeling of home under the headline of international university students' living experiences in student housing in the Metropolitan area of Helsinki. "Home" is not necessarily a place; it can be synonymous with the feeling of rootedness, belonging, and integration. To the foreign residents, it may also be related to a variety of meanings because of their adaptivity to a new living environment. Through observations and interviews, the researcher explores the spatial, social, cultural, and organizational variables to understand whether, why, when, and how the feeling of home is achieved.

This research engaged over sixty respondents by applying the methods of urban hitchhiking, semi-structured interview, graffiti wall, and behavioral mapping. Themes coded from relevant literature and design practices are the guidance of data collecting and qualitative analysis. The spatial design of the student housing is examined from the perspectives of facades, six types of floor plans, vertical circulations, rooms, and public facilities, which indicates less institutional characteristic but more open concepts is required. The narrative of international students' life includes the length of residence, the establishment of friendship, the connection with communities in the neighborhood, and the process of studentification, which are analysed in different geometric scale.

The outcome of is presented with texts and illustrations to demonstrate how international students perceive the space in student housing and their attitudes on the non-spatial settings. Finally, four design implications are suggested for future practices to best meet the unique needs of international students making their home in a place that is not their home.

Keyword: Student housing, the feeling of home, spatial design

Structure of the thesis

The thesis is structured in six sections: 1) introduction; 2) background; 3) methods and data; 4) analysis; 5) findings and design implications; and 6) conclusions.

Chapter 1 describes the motivation and objectives of the research process. It also introduces the research questions and its relevant instructions on the subjects: the student housing and international students.

Chapter 2 briefly explores some of the design projects, which dedicated to providing an enjoyable living environment for student residents; reviews relevant theoretical works on student housing and the feeling of home; and launches a checklist as the guidance of the research.

Chapter 3 describes the methods implemented in the qualitative study. It addresses the ethical concerns and academic criteria for the selection of interview questions and informants. It also determines the focus and limitation for data gathering.

Chapter 4 reports the spatial and non-spatial data which is collected in the field; examines the data according to the aspects of the checklist; and analyzes the data to derive findings and design implications.

Chapter 5 explores the findings gathered from the spatial and non-spatial analysis; seeks to answer the research questions; and discusses the design implications concerning home-like student housing in the Metropolitan area.

Chapter 6 concludes the study and expands the possibilities of developing the topic.

1 .

Introduction

1.1 Personal motivation

The question, “Where are you from?” is a typical conversation starter in the first meeting with someone, especially a foreigner who is of certain ethnic background. Being asked, “Where are you from?” sometimes may imply that a person is expected to introduce what district, city, or country one considers “home.” “Home” sometimes may not refer to someplace other than the place of residence. Personally, “Where are you from?” is a simple question that I can answer without hesitation. However, when the question “Where is home?” arises, I usually keep my answer under wraps until I understand the specific meaning of home in the question. “Home” is not necessarily a place; it can be synonymous with the sense of rootedness, belonging, and acceptance. It may also be related to a variety of meanings because of current trends in increasing transnational mobility.

I have lived in different cities through the years, and now I am living in a student residential building in Helsinki. My personal interpretation of the feeling of home is becoming broader and more adjustable, which has sparked my interest for this research.

1.2 Research question

This study manifests the sense of home under the context of international university students’ living experiences in student housing in the Greater Helsinki. Considering a comprehensive understanding of the meaning and feeling of home, the discussion of home in the thesis is not necessarily a space: it also refers to the feelings and personal emotions. Thus, the researcher is dedicated to collecting spatial facts in student housing in the Metropolitan area as well as the non-spatial evidence shared by the international students.

The primary research question is:

Does the student housing in Metropolitan Helsinki affect international students’ feeling of home? If so, how does it manifest itself?

The question contains three subquestions:

- 1) Do international university students feel at home during their residence in the student housing in Metropolitan Helsinki?
- 2) How do the interior space, facilities, and materials in the student housing encourage/discourage the feeling of home?
- 3) What design potentials can be applied to the student housing to inspire the feeling of home?

1.3 Research context

The Metropolitan area of Helsinki, or Greater Helsinki, consists of four cities—Helsinki, Vantaa, Espoo, and Kauniainen—according to the municipal development of Helsinki-Uusimaa Region*. International university students search for accommodation in the Metropolitan area mainly via four agencies:

- 1) Universities or the university student unions (for example, the AYY of Aalto University);
- 2) Hoas, the Helsinki student housing foundation;
- 3) Housing agencies in the market such as Sato; and
- 4) Leasing private-owned apartments from individuals.

The student housing discussed in the research includes the apartments offered by university/student union and Hoas. The majority of these student housing options are unfurnished in the room, but kitchens and bathrooms are well equipped. The apartments are same-gender, while the student residential buildings are mixed-gender. A student residential building offers housing accommodation, kitchen facilities, storage space, parking lots, laundry machines, and saunas. Clubrooms, self-planted gardens, and grilling places are set accordingly.

The standard room types in a student residential building are as follows:

- 1) single/studio apartment—a single room with independent cooking space and a bathroom;

- 2) shared apartment, including separate bedrooms, public kitchens, showers, and toilets; and
- 3) family/roomie apartment including one or several independent bedrooms, a living room, a kitchen, and bathroom(s).

Searching for an affordable apartment in the Metropolitan area can be difficult, as the rental level among local and international university students is relatively high, especially in the beginning of an academic year (August and September). University-owned student housing is available for degree students (bachelor and master level) who have signed up and paid for student union membership at universities. A large part of the apartments, either furnished or unfurnished, is aimed at students living alone or in shared accommodation. However, the number of applicants exceeds the amount of institutionally provided units every academic year in the Metropolitan area. Therefore, each university hosts entry flats for the students who are in the queue of long-term tenancies. The maximum length of stay in an entry flat is three to six months, and the price depends on individual rental duration. Apart from residing student residential buildings, universities of the Metropolitan also offer another promising option of accommodation—the hotel-based accommodation for incoming doctoral candidates and scholars (e.g., Aalto Inn and Töölö Tower). Regarding the university tradition in the Greater Helsinki, the amount of institutionally provided student accommodation does not necessarily cover the number of the students attending the university. As a result, many students live in Hoas apartments, the business-oriented student housing.

1.4 Objectives

The motivation behind the research is to gain specific knowledge about the feeling of home among international students within the context of the Greater Helsinki. Rather than developing all-encompassing frameworks or typologies, I am instead dedicated to making observations and assessments on the living condition of international university students and suggesting implications which may be useful to further design practices.

2 . Background

2.1 Benchmarking

Student residents' feelings of student housing captures the attention of architects and design practitioners alike. Various design solutions have been produced to provide a pleasant living environment for student residents. To develop a strong sense of personalization, unique styles and materials are incorporated into student housing. For instance, Architects of Invention, a London-based studio, proposed an oasis-like student housing in Birmingham with the design of rooftop gardens and landscaped terraces (Fig. 2.2.1). Bjarke Ingels' firm built a floating student hall in the harbor of Copenhagen by stacking shipping containers on a drifting platform (Fig. 2.1.2). Architects of Tigg Coll Architects used lighting intervention to create an atmosphere of nightclubs in a student housing in east London (Fig. 2.1.3). Distinctive visual identity is another technique applied to the design of residential halls, such as the latticed exterior pattern designed by the French studio Atelier Fernandez & Serres (Fig. 2.1.4) and the wavy-striped facade completed by Studio Gang (Fig. 2.1.5).

The creative arrangement of space also arises positive feelings of residency. For example, Hamonic + Masson & Associés built translucent cubical residential balconies which feature indoor secret gardens and nesting areas for birds (Fig. 2.1.6). The playful design offers natural possibilities for human-animal interaction, which is uncommon in the high-rise buildings. Another prospective case is the Tietgen Student Halls planned by Lundgaard & Tranberg (Fig. 2.1.7), which is conceived in a ring-like structure around which student communities are stacked. Individual rooms face outwards, while double-height kitchens and shared living rooms are extended into the circular courtyard. The designers strive to encourage the sense of community with the strategic spatial layout. Another promising example is the student housing on the Xiangshan Campus of the China Academy of Art, by Amateur Architecture Studio (Fig. 2.1.8). The cluster of dormitories displays not only the interaction within the residents but also the impressive architectural skills of embedding local characters in the modern construction.

An unexpected site for student housing also inspires a unique living experience. For

example, a timber-clad student dormitory is launched in a landscape park in France, which leads to an adaptive lifestyle that may be different from the habits of urban residents (Fig 2.1.9). A factory is converted into student residences, which mixes the old and new textures (Fig. 2.1.10). Furthermore, the multi-functional building is the concept of Yazdani Studio who has built a prototype for the University of Utah (Fig. 2.1.11). The mixed roles of the building include dormitories and a collaborative space where residents can define the function.

Based on the review of student housing design, relevant approaches and their purposes are summarized as one of the resources that guides the thesis.

Contexts	Concerns
terraces/balconies	human-animal interaction
style/atmosphere	distinctive identity
visual identity	fusion functions
public areas	personalization
materiality	community
rooftop	interaction
rooms	lifestyle
layout	

Fig. 2.1.12 - Benchmarking



Fig.2.1.1 Fig.2.1.2

Fig.2.1.3 Fig.2.1.4

Fig.2.1.5 Fig.2.1.6

Fig.2.1.7 Fig.2.1.8



Fig.2.1.9

Fig.2.1.10

Fig.2.1.11



Fig.2.1.1 - Student housing proposal by Architects of Invention

Fig. 2.1.2 - The floating student housing by Bjarke Ingels' firm

Fig. 2.1.3 - The interior of student housing by Tigg Coll Architects

Fig.2.1.4 The student housing with latticed facade by Atelier Fernandez & Serres

Fig. 2.1.5 - The student housing by Studio Gang

Fig.2.1.6 The student housing by Hamonic+Masson & Associés

Fig. 2.1.7 - Tietgen Student Halls by Lundgaard & Tranberg

Fig. 2.1.8 - The student housing on Xiangshan Campus of the China Academy of Art, by Amateur Architecture Studio

Fig. 2.1.9 - The student housing in a park in the Saint-Denis area of Paris, by Belus & Hénocq Architectes

Fig. 2.1.10 - The student housing within a former car-radio button factory in Berlin, by Macro Sea

Fig. 2.1.11 - Lassonde Studios, a fusion student housing by Yazdani Studio

2.2 Literature review

2.2.1 Studies on student housing

Researchers have been addressing student housing as a place for friendship formation (Holahan & Wilcox, 1978) and a tie between students and neighbourhoods (Macintyre, 2003). Likewise, a theory of studentification is developed by Smith (2004) to describe the increasing gathering of students in particular localities. Scholars also recognize institutional and temporary characters of student accommodation (Thomsen, 2007) and the sense of community in dorms (Cheng, 2004; Bocher, Buker & McLeod, 1976). Additionally, some studies have been conducted to test students’ demands and preferences of student housing (La Roche et al., 2010), and to measure students satisfaction on dormitories (Thomsen & Eikemo, 2010; Adriaanse, 2007; Najib, Yusof & Osman, 2011; Sanni-Anibire & Hassanain, 2016).

Seven main topics involving with the research of student housing is summarized as a potential framework of the thesis (Fig. 2.2.1).

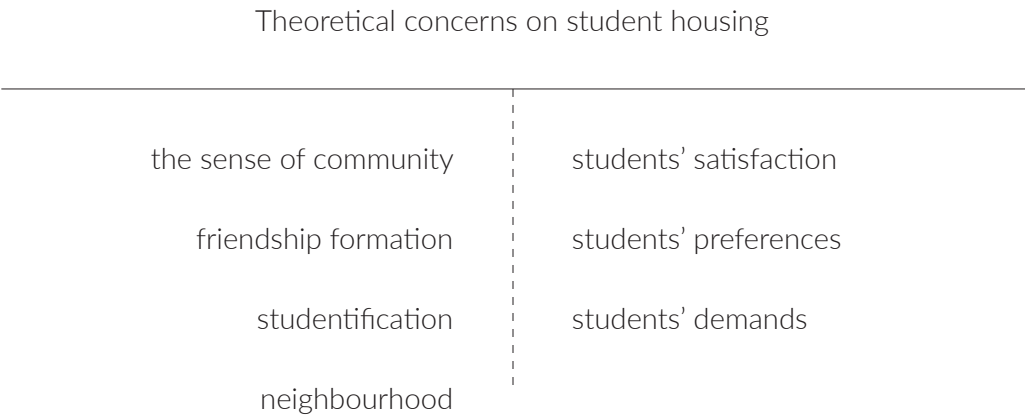


Fig. 2.2.1 - Literature review on student housing

2.2.2 Research of home and the feeling of home

The feeling of home is worthy of researching because immigration (Anton & Lawrence, 2014), residency, and relocation (Scannell & Gifford, 2010) are crucial processes in one's life. Gustafson (2001) states that the meaning of home is variable as people's social connections and daily activities are increasingly disembedded from specific objects and place. Home is a concept of territoriality (Wise, 2000); a place for leisure (Abbott-Chapman & Robertson, 2001); and an environment of memories (Hockey et al., 2005). Home is referred to not only as a spatial concept—the domestic place—but also as a spiritual icon—a space belonging to “me” (Morley, 2001). The feeling of home has been described as emotional notions of rootedness (McAndrew, 1998), familiarity (Clayton et al., 2009), and belongingness (Gomez & Vannini, 2017). Home has also been studied as a site which portrays self-expression and shapes individuality (Saruwono, 2012).

Except for the literal and cognitive descriptions of home and its meanings, scholars also adopt different methods to measure the feeling of home. For instance, Seo and Mazumdar (2011) conducted field research to examine Korean Americans' perceptions of home and commented on the layout of their apartments. Hall and his colleagues (2009) took the qualitative descriptive approach to support their inductive and deductive analysis of the attitude of home among the older people who live in nursing homes. Bland (2005) employed ethnographic methods to assess the living environment of the aged care homes in New Zealand. Castillo (2014) quoted a significant amount of transcript in his work which concentrates on how Africans feel “at home” in the city of Guangzhou.

Overall, research on “home” and “the feeling of home” is associated with the analysis of physical space and the understanding of the person-home relationship. The major points found in the relevant literature are listed in the following section (Fig. 2.2.2).

output	method
familiarity	interview
rootedness	field research
individuality	quote transcripts
belongingness	ethnographic method
self-expression	inductive and deductive analysis
the person-place relationship	
domestic place/residence	
increasing mobility	
territoriality	

Fig. 2.2.2 - The summary of studies on the feeling of home

3 . Methodology & D a t a

The primary concern of selecting the research methods is to generalize spatial and non-spatial variables which may affect international students' feelings of home during their residence in student housing in the Metropolitan area. Sometimes it is difficult to capture spatial ideas in written form (Soja, 1998), especially in place-sensitive research (Gieryn, 2000). As it is preliminarily proposed, the outcome of the study includes texts and visual data. Thus, the researcher selects four methods: urban hitchhiking, semi-structured interview, graffiti wall, and behavioral mapping. The detailed reasons and the implementation are described in the following sections.

3.1 Research methods

3.1.1 Urban hitchhiking

Urban hitchhiking is a reflective approach to explore human-environment relationships by extracting the information of spatial settings and daily lives from the researcher-subject interaction (Malla et al., 2017). In this research, the method is practiced in the specific areas where universities and student housing are located in the Greater Helsinki. During the process, the researcher communicated with the respondents while walking together or standing still in the space. The outputs are mainly reported in written form, but the data also includes photos and diagrams, which visualizes the routes of movements and elements in the space. The purpose of practicing urban hitchhiking is to become familiarized with the physical environment of student housing and the values of international university students. Besides, the method allows unrestricted and unsorted access to the informants, who are the potential participants of the semi-structured interview.

3.1.2 Semi-structured interview

The semi-structured interview is a method of data collection in which allows new contents of questions responding to the reaction of interviewees (Whiting, 2008). Rather than following a precise list of questions, the researcher instead communicates with informants in a semi-structured context. The informants share personal feelings of home and describe their living experience in the student housing in Greater Helsinki. The semi-structured interview enables the students to

express personal opinions according to their priorities. The participation is on a voluntary basis and interviewees could give as many answers as they want.

The researcher employs two methods, urban hitchhiking and semi-structured interview, to collect verbal data from the subjects. The content of questions is guided by the codes which is derived from the benchmarking and literature review (see 4.1). During the conversation, new contents of questions would be addressed according to informants' answers and reactions, but the questions mainly cover seven aspects:

- 1) friend-related aspect such getting acquainted with neighbors and the frequency of encounter;
- 2) time-related aspect such as the length of tenancy, personal study plan, the official residence permission;
- 3) self-related aspect such as the individual definition of comfort, feeling of being invited, or being an outsider;
- 4) cultural-related aspect such as cultural clashes and language barriers;
- 5) community-related aspect such as guilds and student associations;
- 6) environmental aspect such as climate; and
- 7) spatial aspect such as dwelling, playing, and gardening.

3.1.3 Graffiti wall

Graffiti wall is a practice to capture qualitative feedback in a public setting (Martin & Hanington, 2012). In this research, papers with guiding questions are posted to walls in universities, and anyone can make written or visual comments on the papers. This method allows an indirect contact with anonymous samples. Furthermore, these resources may provide details which can no longer be observed or which can be ignored or forgotten by the researcher and participants.

3.1.4 Behavioral mapping

Behavioral mapping is used to visualize location-based observation of human activity (Sommer & Sommer, 2002). The researcher visits the place where some of

the international students live and follows their actions over time and location. The movements of the subjects, time spent alone or with others, and their behaviors are marked in the context of floor plans or sections. These diagrams of plans and sections are illustrated based on researcher's measurements and observations during the site visit.

3.2 Sampling

The detailed personal attitudes on residing student housing are collected from the participants of urban hitchhiking, who actively and explicitly responded to the question: Do you have the feeling of home when living in the student housing? The international students who made positive responses were invited to join the semi-structured interview. The students who answered with a "no" would give reasons behind the statement. In addition, students are asked to compare different apartments that they have lived in, to differentiate their living experience by answering the questions, which are listed in the next section.

The researcher practiced the methods, urban hitchhiking, and graffiti wall, in the areas where universities are located, including Otaniemi, Viikki, Kumpula, Kluuvi, Töölö, and Arabia. By visiting these campuses, interviewees are recruited, and their living addresses are recorded as possible examples of student housing in the research. Another resource of housing samples includes the housing information provided by universities/student unions and Hoas on their official websites. The researcher visited all the addresses that interviewees offer and some of the student housing which is listed online regarding the characters of the space.

3.3 Research ethics

The researcher has given proper and careful consideration to respect the participants' rights to privacy and autonomy. Voluntary participation is ensured in the study, and respondents are allowed to leave the study at any time. The confidentiality and anonymity of the research participants are guaranteed during the data collection, analysis, presentation, and publication. Pictures are taken if the students permit it. Particular care is needed if research participants include disabled students.

4 Analysis

The number of interviewees was roughly 25 international students, and the survey engaged over 60 respondents by applying the methods of urban hitchhiking, graffiti wall, and behavioral mapping. Since I was only capable to approach a small group of subjects, the study was presented with qualitative data and analysis. Moreover, the goal of this research is not to achieve all-encompassing frameworks or typologies but to suggest design implications according to the analysis of the data. Briefly, the research data has been collected in the format of photos, drawings, notes, and voice recordings. The data has been clustered into two dimensions: spatial and non-spatial data, which includes social, cultural, and organizational factors.

The limited amount of subjects could be problematic because some data may not be sufficiently detected. It could be challenging to measure individual perception in this qualitative study because the data may reflect information relating to demography, psychology, ethnography, and sociology. Although these factors were not the main focus of the study, the researcher recorded the data including gender, age, cultural background, and the institutions which interviewees belong. Some data was excluded such as interviewees' facial expression, tones, and body language.

4.1 Thematic coding

Thematic coding is a form of qualitative analysis which establishes a checklist of thematic ideas about the research topic (Flick & Gibbs, 2007). In this research, the themes that linked the relevant design projects (Fig. 2.1.12) and literatures (Fig. 2.2.1 & Fig. 2.2.2) were identified and coded into a checklist as the guideline of the research.

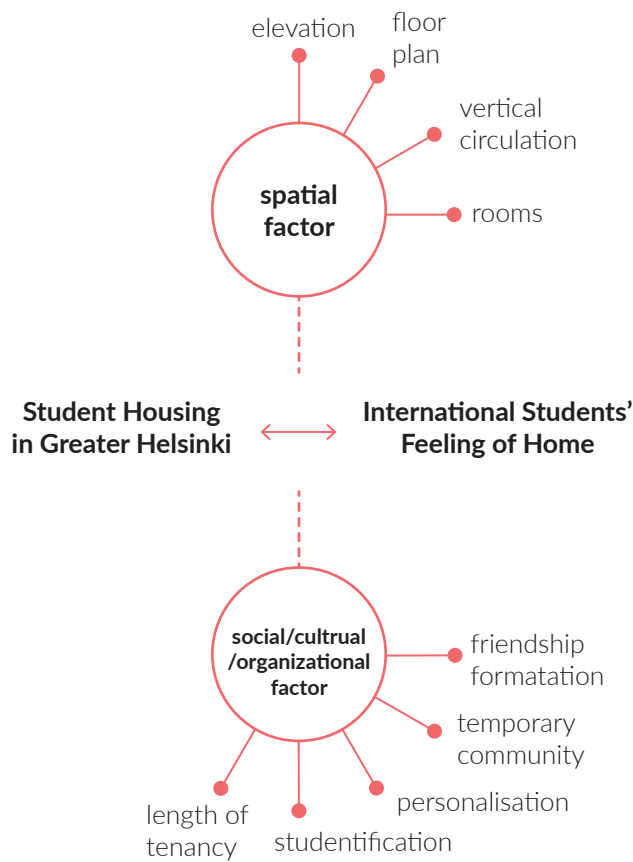


Fig. 4.1 - Thematic coding

4.2 Spatial data

4.2.1 Facades and elevations

The design of facades correspondingly shapes international students' behaviors which may also affect their feelings attached to the student housing. In this study, the physical components of a facade include the exterior surfaces, the balconies, and the windows. Designers need to pay attention to the design of the entrances

and the street level of the facade because these human-scale spaces are where students are directly influenced. The design of balconies is manifested as an approach to increase the quality of communication and interaction among residents. Furthermore, strategic design solutions should be incorporated to provide the dwellers flexible choices to open and close the windows and curtains.

Exterior surfaces

The exterior of residential buildings in Metropolitan Helsinki is of symmetric and duplicated patterns, which are also applied to most of the student housing. The array of the facades (Fig. 4.2.1) captures the front sides of 39 student residential building in the Greater Helsinki and is organized by color. As the collection displays, the frequently used color schemes of the student housing are either in earth tone or pale colors. Such colors, patterns, and materials on the entire exterior of the student housing are often overlooked by the international university students, but they are usually sensitive to the colors and materials within the human scale or at ground level.

"I don't remember exactly what colors are painted on the building. It should be brownish somehow. But I know the color of the entrance. It is in bright green with grey lines. I use the door every day so that I can see the colors there. I pretty like the color."

"I think most of the buildings in Helsinki look the same. And I can explain why I think so. Because when I pass a building, it is too high to see the color above ground level, I can only see the bottom floor on the street. While the color on the bottom floor looks quite the same and normal."

"I don't remember the color of my building. I am too familiarized with its location; I don't need to remember the color or some details."

The facade of a residential building does not have evident attributes on the way in which international students feel attached, but they are aware of the design of the exterior on the street level and at the entrances. Thus, further spatial intervention

can be applied to these human-scale spaces to develop a stronger person-housing attachment. However, a facade not only displays the design and materials but also accommodates various human preferences involving the facade (e.g., utilizing the balcony, opening or closing windows, opening or closing curtains, etc.). The details are discussed in the following sections.



Fig. 4.2.1 - An array of the facades

Balconies

The facade of a building breathes through balconies. A range of students have balconies in their student apartments in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area. There are mainly three types of balconies (Fig. 4.2.2):

- 1) thresholds on the elevation with protection, serving the function as a balcony;
- 2) platforms projecting from the exterior which are supported by columns and enclosed with walls or balusters above the ground level; and
- 3) an extension of the floor which is recessed or covered by the upper deck.

The first type, rather than a balcony, is a window-oriented design in student housing. The external balconies (type 2 and type 3) are designed to enlarge the indoor space and expand the area of activities. According to the field observation, balconies in student housing are not designed as social spaces or for communicating purposes. Most of the balconies are planned as privately-owned spaces in an apartment because it is physically and visually isolated from the

surrounding neighbors' apartments. Moreover, the size is commonly designed for single-occupancy use. Thus, the design of balconies does not cultivate many possibilities for interaction with either roommates or neighbors. The responses of the interviewees also support this statement. Some international residents report that their balconies are unused while others mentioned the impractical manifestations of the design.

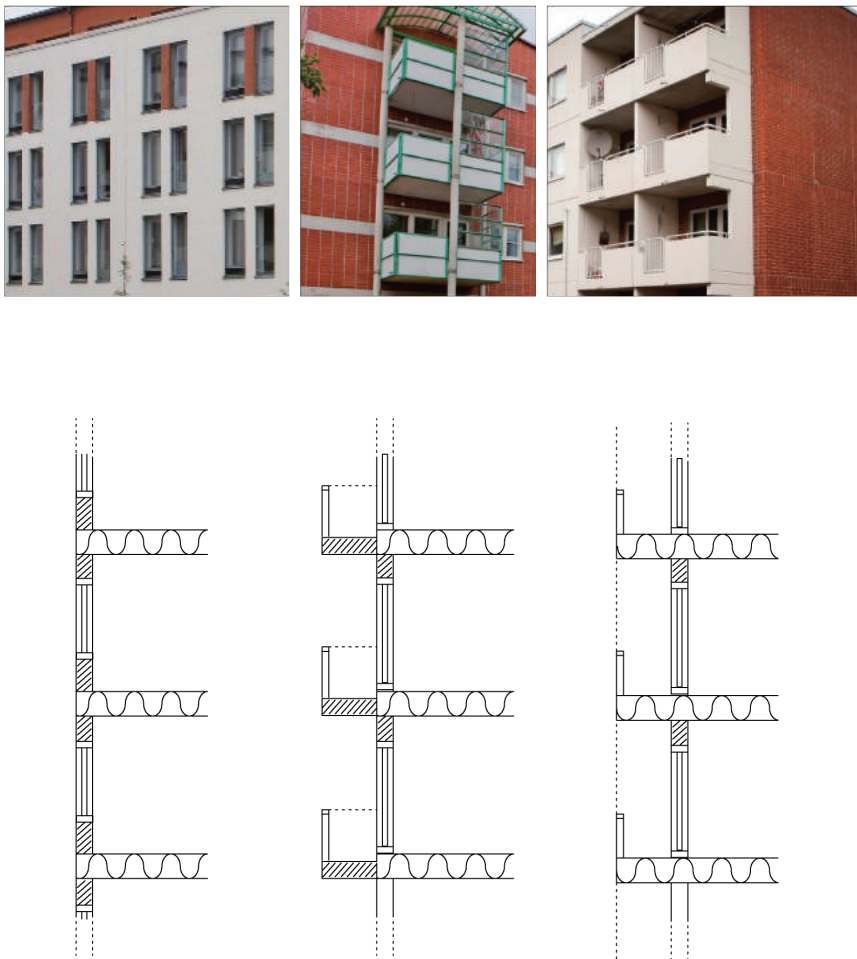


Fig. 4.2.2 - Three types of the balconies

"My roommates and I do not use the balcony. It is a storage space for suitcases, vacuum cleaners and abandoned furniture."

"My balcony covers the length of the living room and the bedroom. It is a waste to design such a huge outdoor space if it is open because it is useless in the long winter. I would rather have a small and closed balcony so that I can take full advantages of it around the year. "

"In the summer, I sometimes chill in the balcony. It will be fantastic if someone can join me, no matter my roommates or other people. But it is impossible."

The balconies of student housing in the Metropolitan area limit individual choices of using the space and restrain communication within residents in the scale of the apartment or apartment building. Therefore, further approaches may consider adopting the strategy of shared balconies to enhance interconnection and communication within the residents.

Windows

A window on the facade is an opening which allows for either partial or full segregation or the unhindered passage of light, sound, and air. In return, environmental and climatic factors, such as temperature, humidity, brightness, and noise, also affect the manner in which students use the windows. Due to the existence and effectiveness of central ventilation systems, air circulation in student housing is relatively independent from the natural ventilation through windows. Indeed, the opening and closure of a window are not strictly involved in air circulation.

Additionally, it appears that a regional characteristic of student housing is that the windows are massively covered by curtains. The visual documentation of two facades (Fig. 4.1.3 & Fig. 4.1.4) illustrates that a majority of the windows in student housing are covered, especially on the street level. Empirical evidence from the interviews also denotes the international students' preference of staying in their rooms with the curtains drawn because there are no other alternatives. Such an

inflexible lack of options is a result of certain spatial design, for instance, the missing of visual barriers between windows and pedestrians and the distance of two blocks.

"I leave my curtains closed because the window faces the street, and anyone can look inside."

"I always have my shades closed during the day, whether it's sunny or raining because the screen of my laptop and TV is glaring. Sometimes I open the curtains in the evening after I shut off the light."

"Most of the time, I keep my window and curtain closed because I can see what my neighbors are doing and they can see me. If I want to see trees or sky, I can go outside."

"I never shut the curtain because tall trees are blocking my window, and there is not enough light reach inside. Besides, it is great to have the nature scene."

Moreover, residents' activities near or related to the window is varied according to the spatial design and interior setting. Facilities such as the indoor heating system may also make impacts on students' acts. It is a typical design of student housing that the heating system is set beneath the window. Some students intend to leave sizeable vacant space around the heater to ensure the efficiency of room heating. Consequently, activities near or relating to the window may be neglected or restricted regarding such arrangement of heaters, which is another example of inflexibility.

4.2.2 Plans

The design of floor plan is one of the factors which may affect the bond between international students and student housing. Although the feeling of home varies from person to person, it can be reflected from the spatial layout concerning the reasonableness, amenity, flexibility, and personalization. After the site visit, the research clusters the student housing in the Greater Helsinki into six types based



Fig. 4.1.3 - Window pattern of Berlininkatu 5



Fig. 4.1.4 - Window pattern of Brysselinkatu 3

on the features of floor plans. The discussion of the floor plans in this section is on a building scale. The detailed layouts within the apartments are analyzed in another section (see 4.1.4).

Type 1: Double-loaded corridors

It is a prototypical example that apartments are arranged on both sides of a passage corridor, which is a long double-loaded corridor, in the student housing in Greater Helsinki (Fig. 4.2.5). The hallways are long and narrow with doors located symmetrically opposite each other. The design of long double-loaded corridors is one of the least preferred designs among the informants because of its institutional and unbreathable characteristics that banish the feeling of home.

"The corridors outside my room are green. It is pretty long, especially when I stand in the one end. I am so so with green, but it makes me uncomfortable to walk between two long, fluorescent green walls with so many doors next to each other. There are different green paints on the wall. The color is annoying when the light is on because it is reflective!"

"A long straight corridor is hardly inviting, because there is nothing but closed doors alongside. The path itself is a closed space, and I can feel the facilities above my head, although they are covered by sheets. The ceiling there is not that tall. I will say this type of corridor makes me feel bad sometimes but not always."

"I like the space of staircases in this building because it is open with entire window facade. It is bright, and I can see beautiful views outside, sometimes people walking around. But the corridors in the middle are suffocating. I want to escape when walking down the corridor because everything is wrong there."

"It (the building) is new and clean... a good design... I live on the top floor. When I reach my floor and go inside the corridor, it feels like I am going to another world—a mini-sized world. I think that public areas should be bright and empty."

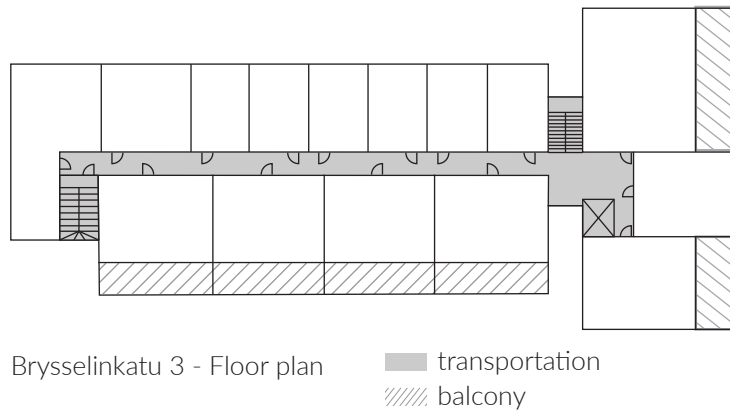


Fig. 4.2.5 - A floor plan with long corridor

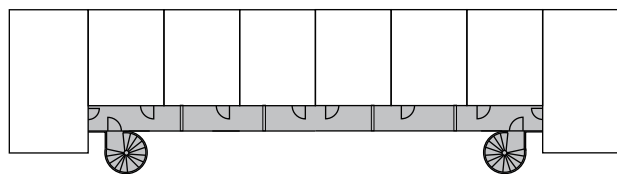


Fig. 4.2.6 - Student housing in Siltakuja 2

Based on students' comments, the design of double-loaded corridor leads to less feeling of home. Such linear space usually offers a strong sense of institutionality because of the symmetrical and duplicated arrangement of objects such as doors and lights. An unbreathable atmosphere pervades in the double-loaded corridors because there is no windows or natural light. Thus, the lighting and air circulation in the enclosed space largely depends upon appliances, which have little sympathy.

Type 2: Balcony access block

In a balcony access block, the balcony is a linear outdoor corridor which is visually and physically open to the public (Fig. 4.2.7). Except for the function of a hallway, external corridors also serve as a shelter, balcony, and social space, which may facilitate frequent encounters and the establishment of an intimate neighbor relationship. The design facilitates the communication with not only the neighbours in a residential building, but also the passer-by. Regarding the horizontal circulation, each floor of the multi-level block is clustered as a spatial subunit, which can become a smaller scale of community in the building.



Avaruuskatu 3 - Floor plan

■ transportation

Fig.4.2.7 - The floor plan of a balcony access block



Fig. 4.2.8 - Student housing in Avaruuskatu 3

Residents of student housing in Avaruuskatu 3 (Fig. 4.2.8) commented on their feelings of living in the balcony access block. It became apparent from students' description that they are satisfied with the spatial layout. The concept of the balcony corridor entails a gradual change of spatial experience from open space into closed space—from the exterior to the interior. Although the hallway of a

residential building is shared by the residents, the partition walls and colorful doors imply the division of public zone. Thus the area belonging to each apartment located within the public space can be easily recognized. The spiral stairs of the student housing (Avaruuskatu 3) are enclosed with the light-leaking material. It allows breathability and an open view of the external environment. However, such openness of design may have seasonal disadvantages, especially in the winter when snow and ice cover the walking area.

Type 3: Semi-detached student housing

A semi-detached student housing is a group of residential buildings which are built as one of a pair and share a common wall in between. Usually, the layout of one block is a mirror image of the other's (Fig. 4.2.9). Sometimes, the facade of the two sides is also of the mirror symmetry (Fig. 4.2.10). Although the floor plan of a student housing does not necessarily have enormous impacts on the living experience, the location of doors or their distance to a stairwell can be an encouragement or discouragement to the feeling of home.

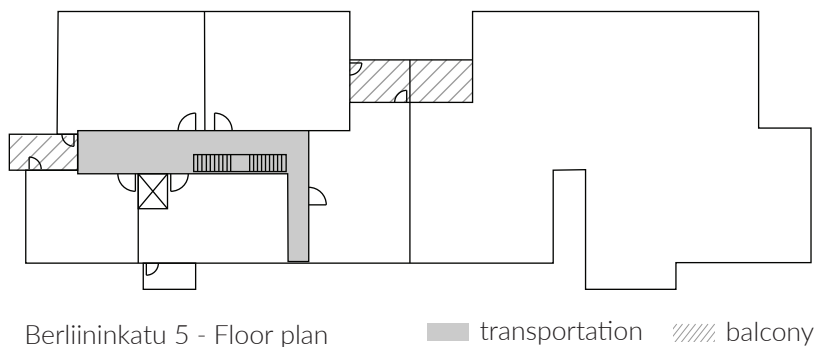


Fig.4.2.9 - The floor plan of a semi-detached student housing

The discussion is expanded with the layout of the student housing in Berlininkatu 5 (Fig. 4.2.9). According to the statements of the international residents, they have a similar preference on the location of the door. Apartments are more likely to be labeled “homey” by the respondents if the door locations heighten the sense of personal space.

"The door of my apartment is facing the staircases. It only takes one step from the door to the stairs. In the first few days, I needed to watch my step just in case any accidents happened. But now I am pretty fine with the design, but if we are discussing if it feels 'homey' then I would say no. My neighbor apartments seem to have a 'better deal' because the space in front of their doors is more proper than mine. I think that they can somehow put a mat there or something."



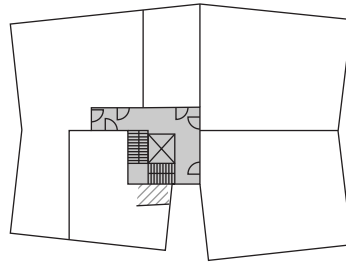
Fig.4.2.10 - The symmetrical facade of the student housing in Berliininkatu 5

Type 4: U-shape circulation

The U-shape circulation is a centralized layout of corridors and stairs (Fig. 4.2.11). Usually, two parallel flights of straight stairs are joined by a landing, which requires a 180-degree turn in the walking path. It is also possible for an elevator to be inserted into the middle of the stairs (Fig. 4.2.12). Such internal circulation can be comfortably fit into an architectural plan, and it is usually placed against the elevation where natural light and heat can reach the corridor through windows. Since the dwellers did not make their attitudes explicit on the U-shape circulation, no data is collected specifically on this type of floor plan.

Type 5: Townhouse

The townhouse is a unique type of student housing in the Metropolitan area of Helsinki (Fig. 4.2.14). Commonly, occupants enter the residential building through



Pasteurinkatu 1 - Floor plan ■ transportation // balcony

Fig.4.2.11- A floor plan with U-shape circulation

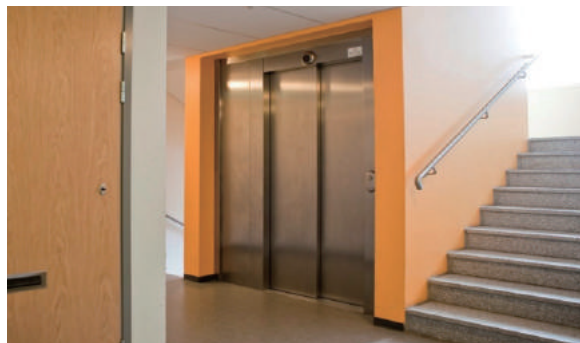
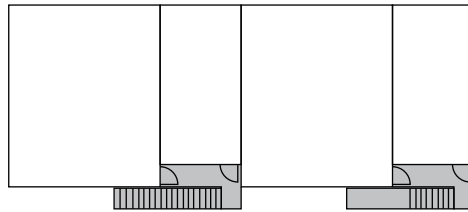


Fig.4.2.11- A floor plan with U-shape circulation

the entrance door and reach their apartments through the shared corridor. However, on the ground level of a townhouse, each flat has an independent entryway that is accessed either from pedestrian or via (semi) private front yards. The second floor is enterable with a separate path-an external staircase leading to the apartments (Fig. 4.2.13). Some residents perceive their residence in the townhouse as a stressful experience due to the spatial layout. They feel anxious because the doors of their apartment are directly open to the public and can be easily accessed by anyone. Besides, it does not allow the tenants time and space before meeting the visitors.

"The door of my apartment is facing the street. It is convenient that I can enter my apartment from the street. But sometimes the door annoys me because it feels not safe enough although I locked the doors. It feels like anybody on the street can knock on my door, but that never happens."



Kilonrinne 10 - Floor plan ■ transportation

Fig.4.2.13 - A floor plan of townhouse student housing



Fig. 4.2.14 - Townhouse student housing in Väinö Auerin Katu 1

Type 6: The student housing with an anteroom

An anteroom is a small outer room which leads to two or more private apartments (Fig. 4.2.15). The front-door space between adjacent flats are enclosed with a simple structure and semi-transparent materials, by which means an anteroom is obtained. Because of the transitional space—the anteroom—apartments are segregated from the common transportation space in the building. Such design of the anteroom is found in the student housing in Jämeräntaival 11, and it is greatly appreciated by the residents. They emphasized that their feelings of the student housing attain a more distinct identity because the privacy is guaranteed.

Another practical value of the anteroom is the indirect contact with neighbors and

pedestrians without hindering the privacy of the residents. Some students display artifacts on the sill side of the windows in the anterooms, and passersby can see the ornaments from the outside. The design of the anteroom is a good practice as it strategically contributes to self-display and personalisation. Residents communicate with the neighbors through their settings in the anteroom.

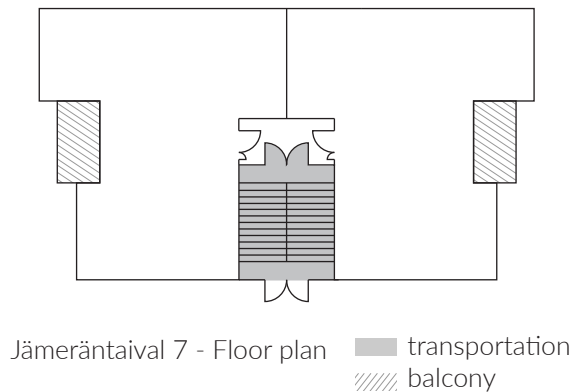


Fig. 4.2.15 - The floor plan with anteroom

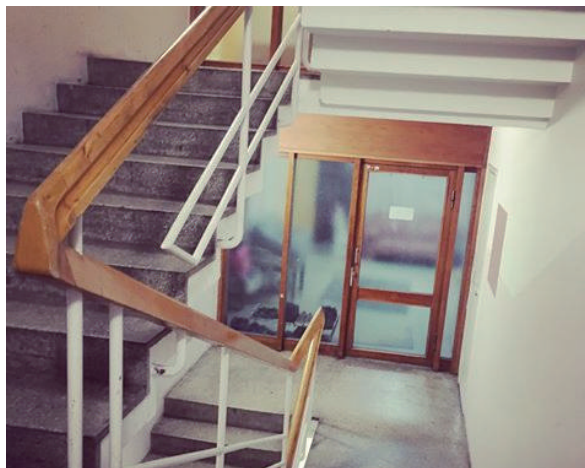


Fig. 4.2.16 - The anteroom in Jämeräntaival 7

4.2.3 Vertical circulation and flat roofs

Vertical circulation

The vertical circulation in a student housing consists of distinct spatial components such as ramps, stairs, and elevators, which provide viable functions of moving between different floors or within a floor. One of the initial concerns of the vertical circulation in student housing is to satisfy the demands of all the residents regarding their abilities or disabilities. Every user in the student housing should be able to freely and quickly move around, and all the exits should be easily found. Properly designed circulation in the student housing allows every user to understand the layout quickly and access the routes easily.

In this study, I chose five international students and asked them to mark down the routes along which they move in the student housing within the span of two weeks. All the participants drew their movement in section diagrams of the student housing that they live in, counted the number of people they met, and recorded the interaction during the meeting. The drawings of each person during the two weeks are merged and re-drawn by the researcher, and the results are presented and analyzed in this section (Fig. 4.2.17).

It is a common layout design that laundry rooms, sauna, club rooms, parking rooms, and storage spaces occupy the first floor of a student housing. Thus, the ground level of the student housing is a crucial space where casual encounters take place. On average, every occupant of a multi-storied student housing needs to use elevators or stairs at least two times a day—in the morning and before reaching home. As presented in the diagrams, students mostly move from ground floor to the story where they live. Four international students out of five avoid visiting other floors apart from the level they live.

Irrespective of the choices of different routes, the location of destination is of paramount importance. One respondent living on the second level went to the top floor every week because the public sauna is located there. Such spatial arrangement encourages residents' mobility through the entire building, which may bring more chances and higher frequency of encountering the neighbors. Since the

frequent meeting is one of the favorable conditions of establishing an intimate interpersonal relationship (see 4.3.4), international students and students who wish to meet more potential friends will be the leading beneficiary group. Thus, designers should consider arranging different functions on different levels of a building to facilitate a pleasant living environment. Besides, public facilities can also be arranged on the top floor or the rooftop.

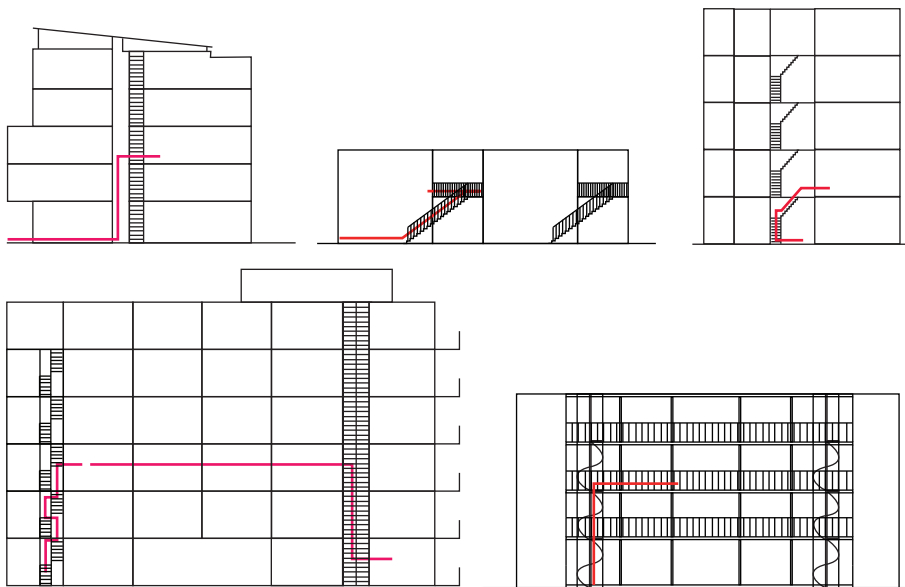


Fig.4.2.17 - The daily routes of 5 students

Flat Roofs

A flat roof is a roof with a small pitch, which is contrary to the angle of a sloped roof. Flat roofs are widely used in student housing (Fig. 4.2.18) because it is one of the most cost-efficient roof shapes. The surface area of a roof is less than a pitched roof because it is flatter, thus requiring less material which makes the cost also less. As space below and above the flat roof can be entirely used, the rooftop can be designed into a functional room or an open platform.

In some of the student housing in the Greater Helsinki, the flat roofs are designed for recreation such as roof gardening, chilling, and grilling (Fig 4.2.19). Flat roofs

may also serve as a sauna, a club room, or a gym, with protective walls or open structures. Furthermore, the roof space may even become an area for storage. In general, the respondents of the study show positive attitudes on the design of the flat roof. Some informants also mentioned the concept of a rooftop cafe and a tennis court.

"It is great to chill on the rooftop, especially in the summer. There are sofas and chairs which allow people to stay for a longer time. I sometimes go to the rooftop for reading and chilling."

"I love the rooftop! It is a perfect design to have a mini garden and a grill machine. But I think that the roof space is not big enough. If a group of people occupies the roof, then it turns to be a private roof, because there is no space for other people."

"I live in a very old building so the roof is not specially designed for any purpose. I wish that I can play tennis on the roof."

"I don't know what can be done on the roof... maybe a restaurant for a cafe?"



Fig. 4.2.18 - Flat roofs of the student housing

In brief, the vertical circulation in the student housing defines the routes in which residents move every day. Spatial intervention is a probable driving force to encourage the close connections between the residents because the rational and practical circulation in a building facilitates one's encounters with the neighbors. Designers should also make maximum use of the space on the rooftop, which is ample space for gathering.



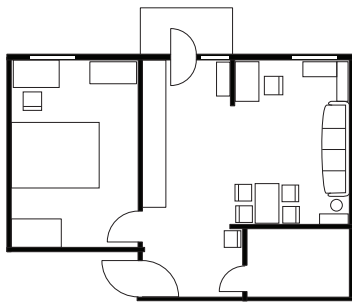
Fig 4.2.19 - Roof garden in Tilanhoitajankaari 11

4.2.4 Rooms

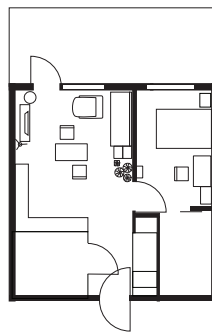
The study of rooms focuses on the interior settings and international students' activities in their places. I visited some of the student apartments to observe their behaviors and movements. The observation of each person lasted for approximately six hours, and the result was documented with the method of behavioral mapping. The physical setting of the rooms was illustrated in the diagrams of floor plans, and the movements of the students were recorded with shadows. Additionally, participants shared their stories of the ways in which they furnished and decorated their rooms. They also described their feelings of home within the context of their rooms.

Physically, designers drop hints about how to arrange the rooms, for example, in the position of sockets or the length of a wall. However, students set the interior in various ways. The result is illustrated in the diagrams showing different room

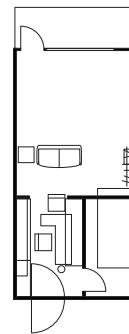
types and the styles of furnishing (Fig. 4.2.20). Some of the international students had put all the furniture against the wall, intending to arrange an empty space in the middle of the room; some students divided the room into different functioning zones; and some students arranged the furniture without a formal logic. International students arranged the interior setting based on the personal preference and demand, but the way in which they furnished and decorated their rooms reflect how they have adjusted themselves to the new living environment.



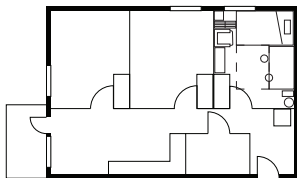
Family apartment 1



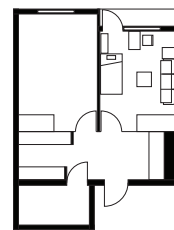
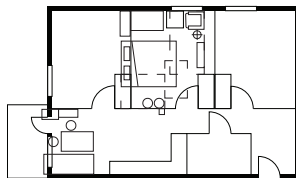
Family apartment 2



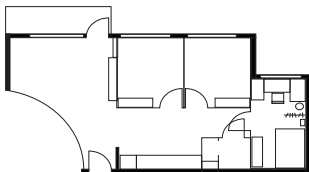
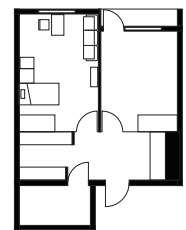
Studio apartment



Shared apartment 1



Shared apartment 2



Shared apartment 3

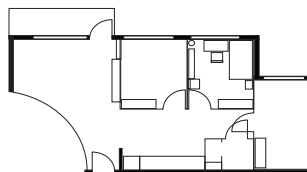


Fig. 4.2.20 - The layout of some of the student apartments

It is beneficial to study the manners in which residents behave in their rooms as it may be helpful to understand international students' feeling of home. As illustrated (Fig. 4.2.21), except for the time spent sleeping, students spend most of their time near the space where chairs, armchairs, or sofas are placed. Each student lives and socializes in different ways. Some students have a large desk surface and wish to have private study space. Some are willing to study elsewhere but need space to socialize in their room. Some students separate the room into a social area and study/sleep space or arrange the furniture symmetrically about the room's axis. Many of them keep the room as it is while some others regularly change the interior settings. The ceiling height of student housing has also encouraged some students to think about the possibility of contracting a loft level. Thus, the options for personalizing the living environment is fruitful in the student housing. The design of unfurnished rooms is the most flexible approach regarding the diversity of preferences and demands.

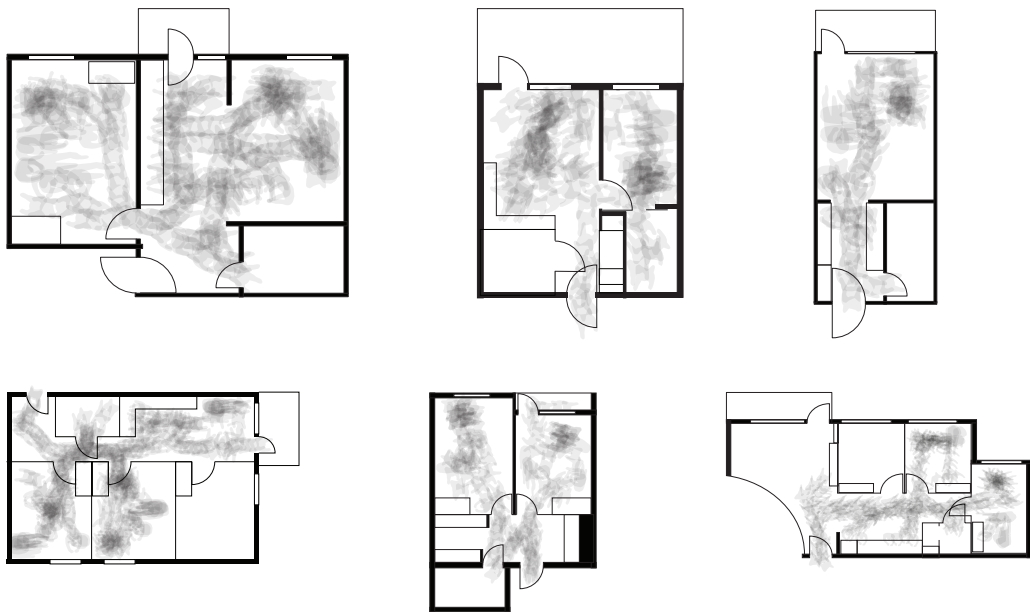


Fig. 4.2.21 - Behavioral mapping of the international student in their rooms

Since most of the student housing is unfurnished, international students need to purchase furniture, objects, and artifacts according to their demand and preference. These objects can be interpreted as a form of personalization which is related to students' financial, aesthetic, or symbolic concerns. It seems that male and female students have different purposes and approaches to individualizing the living environment. Female students have stronger wishes to decorate the room with photos, trinkets, plants, and crafts. A few female students reported that they would rearrange the settings in their rooms regularly, several students emphasized their fondness for the plants with which they decorated the room, and another female mentioned that she displayed her handcrafts on the wall.

Most of the females narrated that they would decorate the desks and walls to create a more individualized and more aesthetically pleasing space. The intention of choosing artifacts are not only to please themselves but also to display the memories associated with particular meanings. Reversely, the males may have weaker demands of making the living environment different from the original room. They may not have the same motivation to personalize the place compared to the female students. The objects that they chose reflect their concerns more on functionality than the women did, such as a small rug or a guitar. Only one male admitted that he was trying to make his room visually different. Some male students mentioned their unwillingness to display personal objects or memories in the space they live.

Although personalizing the rooms is a practical act to heighten the feeling of home, some of the international students pay less attention to the feelings over the functions. They insist that the room is a place where they can sleep and spend the time off school, so they are willing to live in the apartments with few pieces of furniture and no trinkets. Besides, some international students state that their impermanent residence in the student housing restricts their choices of furniture and decorations. They are more willing to buy used furniture because it is a more cost-effective solution than purchasing new furniture. As the ownership of the furniture passes from student to student, each owner may have a less personal attachment to the furniture, which may have negative impacts on their feelings of home.

"I don't have many choices of what can be done in my room, because I know I will live here only for two years. I don't want to spend too much money on housing. All my furniture are bought from the recycling center. I avoid buying new things."

"I do not have a bed. I only have my mattress, and I put it on the ground. I slept on the floor for almost three years. I do not mind where I sleep as long as I have a good rest."

Many interviewees talked about the comfort and restfulness they feel in their rooms. However, they also emphasized that the interior of student housing discourages the feeling of home because the spatial concept is standardized. Some of the informants criticize the institutional characters of the space, which indicates that the interior design of student housing is not as satisfied as it is assumed.

"I pretty like my room, the view outside is beautiful. What I dislike is the boring materials in the room. The materials do not feel like a home, but remind me that it is just temporary."

"It makes it a rather institutional character when every room is the same. The design makes it a bit impersonal because of a lot of things. The colors are either white or grey. The materials and furniture also have the institutional feeling. But on the other hand, your room is sort of what you make of it."



Fig. 4.2.22 - A comparison of the interior of two student housing

Students define some of the materials, vinyl tiles, and metal, as the "institutional"

manifestations, which is the opposite the feeling of home. Besides, smooth-finished walls are less preferred than the painted concrete block walls. Soft materials such as textiles and carpets are favorable among the informants. Artistic or fashionable graffiti rather than printed posters give the residents more scope for creativity and personalization.

4.3 Social, cultural and organizational factors

4.3.1 The length of residence

The length of residence or the valid duration of the tenancy is the foundation to discuss international students' feeling of home. The students who have long-term occupancy are more willing to attach themselves to their student apartments than the ones who live in student housing for a shorter fixed period, who are, in this case, the exchange students. International students prefer to rent a student apartment because it is a guaranteed option that they can decide the length of tenancy agreements. Furthermore, it appears that first-year international students prefer to queue for the newly built student housing or the ones near the location of their universities, but this statement is not made on clear quantitative evidence.

"I lived in Otaniemi for one and a half years. Afterward, I moved to an apartment in Helsinki because I wanted to live closer to the city center. Otaniemi is different from any other place of the greater Helsinki. It is boring to live there, so I moved out."

"My first apartment in Helsinki is a shared apartment. It usually takes about 40 minutes to travel from my home to the school... I rented a student apartment because I have a limited budget for housing in the beginning. But now I can afford a better apartment. I rent a single apartment near the city center."

According to the qualitative results of the interviews, senior international students are more demanding than the freshmen. Senior students have developed clear expectations of the lifestyle and the location they wish to live, so they are willing to pay more rent for an ideal location, better views, or faster internet connection.

They become increasingly reluctant to share bathrooms and kitchens with other residents because they usually feel the increasing desire for privacy and independence.

4.3.2 Studentification

According to Smith's (2002) description of studentification, it is a process by which specific locations are gradually dominated by student residents. Studentification is a typical scenery within the areas of educational institutions or student villages. However, students are not the origin of studentification; instead, the landlords are the force behind the trend of studentification.

There may exist different effects of planning a student village in a particular neighborhood. For instance, the large proportion of young residents gathering in the student village may lead to commercial and entrepreneurial opportunities such as the specific types of retail and services. Spatially, the increase in the density of student residents may upgrade or downgrade the physical environment. The expansion of students may increase the pressure on public services including transportation, policing, and cleansing. The non-student dwellers in the region may also suffer the noise and visual mess.

In the Metropolitan area of Helsinki, the high concentration of students exist in the neighborhood of student villages, such as the student village of Aalto University in Otaniemi, Espoo. Some international students mentioned that restaurants, gyms, libraries, and stores are within walking distance of the student villages, and the average walking duration is over ten minutes. Regarding the designated routes from student apartment to other destinations in the student village, the comments by international students point to a sharply bipolar division of satisfaction and dissatisfaction concerning the feeling of home.

"I will never live in Otaniemi because there is nothing but students and a school. It is crazy that some of my friends can live their lives without leaving Otaniemi in a week. There is everything regarding daily needs, but there is no diversity. To me, life without diversity is dead life."

"Otaniemi feels like a home for many reasons, but the most important one is that I am living close to my friends. We have dinner together almost every day. Sometimes we even go to classroom together. Staying together with my friends is important to me because I do not have many friends. Living in Otaniemi means I can meet my friends as frequent as I want."

"Living in Otaniemi makes me feel safe and cozy. On the one hand, it is easy to do almost everything such as eating, sleeping, studying, shopping. On the other hand, I feel that I am living in a community. All the residents around me, no matter strangers or friends, share the same identity—all of us are students. I am the same as the others which makes me comfortable and safe."

"When I lived in Otaniemi, I always wish to move out because I want to see something different. While living outside, Otaniemi has naturally made me appreciate everything there. I pretty enjoy the riverside, the architecture, and the peace."

International students' feeling of home varies regarding their preference of the settings in the student villages. The enormous advantage of gathering residential apartments in student villages is that students can easily and frequently meet with peers, which is the foundation of establishing intimate relationships. Some residents insist that the student housing is convenient because of the geographic concentration of services. In return, a major deficiency of these services is the absence of diversity because students' activities are restricted within walking distance of the student villages.

Some international students emphasize that their living experience in the student village is satisfying. Regarding the dissatisfactions, it is evident that the areas of student villages are becoming "ghost towns" over the holidays, semester breaks, and especially over the summer, which is a characteristic negation of the feeling of home. International students are aware of the emptiness, and some of them suggest the adaptive reuse of the space in the summer.

"During the semester break, many international students will leave

Finland, so the apartments and the public facilities are not in use for around three months. It is a long time, and it is wasteful if the spaces are empty."

"The whole campus is almost empty, and all the buildings are closed! This is a very stupid idea. Students should have the rights to use or rent the space and facilities because it is a very long time that we should do something we want such as start our own business."

Inspired by the comments of the interviewees, the concept of fusion functions may be a feasible approach to change the scenery of the "ghost-town." The public space may be refined as collaborative space, where residents can rent and define the function of the area. Moreover, the relevant facilities can be rented out in the summer. However, this student housing is administered by institutions and organizations where a certain level of management and control is needed. Additionally, some of the negative descriptions are also associated with the language barrier, cultural clashes, and unfamiliarity with surroundings, which may enhance the feeling of isolation rather than the feeling of home.

"I was quite actively searching for activities so that I can make friends and learn about local student life. I had lots of fun... It is difficult for me to understand Finnish, and, in my opinion, it is still unfair even if I can speak Finnish. It is fair if everyone is using a secondary language. But it is probably less fun because everyone will struggle with a second language."

"Many things are happening in the dark. I mean there are plenty of secret activities and places in Otaniemi. I would never have known the existence of a theater if a Finn had not led me there."

"I know that there is a club room in the building I live. It should belong to a student association. They host events and meetings almost every week. Usually, only members are eligible to join the activities. It is a little bit sad that events happening in my building are not open to everyone."

Informants shared their personal experience in the interviews, which indicates that

foreign students have specific demands for the feeling of being invited. The visibility and accessibility of the facilities and the open concept in spatial arrangement are insightful approaches to creating a pleasant living environment for international students.

4.3.3 Temporary communities

Investigating the temporary community in the student residential buildings appears to provide useful knowledge to understand the way in which international students attach themselves to the student housing. The juxtaposed words “temporary” and “community” delineate the average duration of residence in student housing, and indicate the sense of community which may be gained in a relatively short period of time. International students can form communities with their schoolmates, roommates, neighbors, people who speak the same language, or those sharing common interests. These potential resources are often accessible in particular areas, such as student housing.

In other words, student housing represents an emergence of the profound society off the campus. It opens up another possibility for international students to build interpersonal connections. The context of temporary communities in student housing is also different from the association or groups in schools because residence community rarely requires the display of professional knowledge, talents, and skills. However, the communities formed in student housing meets all the criteria for the general sense of community: 1) feelings of membership; 2) interdependent connection among the members; and 3) commonality or similar needs.

Many informants compared the resident's community formed in student housing to the on-campus student community. The resident's community is an inclusive group which allows the students to share their knowledge, experiences, concerns, and worries. Likewise, some students behave more casually in the student housing than they do at school. They described their opinions in the following way:

“A lot of people are really real [in the dorm]. Sometimes I can see students with unkempt hairs and no makeup. It is a good thing to see the relaxing

students without pretending to behave well."

"Students from different cultural and academic background are mixed. I feel included there because we are the same. Everyone is the same because we don't know the differences between each other."

"It is interesting to interact with people who are not necessarily my friends. I guess I wish to meet my neighbors because I am living with them, but I don't feel intimidation at all."

A number of the participants described the context of the activities organized in the student housing. The typical duration of the events is around two hours, during which students gather and have relaxed conversation. Sometimes, drinks and desserts are offered if participants pay the fee in advance. Although the activities enable the peer engagement of residents, some informants noticed the limitations. Concerning the diversity of themes, most of the students responded in negative points of view. According to the informants, such activities usually take place in the clubrooms while outdoor space is ignored. Indeed, international students wish to broaden their networks not only with peers but also with non-student residents in the neighborhood.

"I go to sauna one or two times a month. I choose to go there in the public session because I can share my time with others. Usually, there are four or five people in the space. We have small talks there, but it is a pity that we almost do not have any chance to meet in daily life. I don't mind who I will meet in the sauna, or what conversations we will have. I wish that I could meet more people in the sauna. Even more, I can meet people who are not students."

"I usually smoke downstairs in front of the building, because there is only one garbage tin. I often meet two Finnish men living in another building, and they are not students. It is a good [way to] start [talking] to local people. If I want to know more about Finland, I need to talk to the adults, not only the students."

Student housing may offer opportunities for encountering and communicating with students, but the social connection with the non-students is less possible. Thus, the community is mostly seen as the temporary engagement with peers rather than a build up of long-term social networks. However, there may exist longer-lasting communities—the resident committee—in some of the student housing, which provides the students with opportunities to develop leadership skills in an off-campus context. Some students disagree that resident committee is synonymous with social interaction and peer engagement. This statement is supported by some of the informants and their comments.

“Why [do] we need a student committee in the student housing? Even if we have one, it should be a closed group. I don’t think the students are open and active enough to have a proper committee depending on my knowledge of Finnish culture.”

“The leaders of a residential committee should care [for] the needs of all the residents as well as the living environment. I think the students are too busy to take care of the other people. It is not that possible to make a tighter relationship among students, so it is not necessary to have a student committee.”

“We have a committee and a facebook page. But I don’t know who they are and what are their plans. They should bond all the students together, not only the members of the committee.”

If the interviewees’ verbal indications are accurate, it appears that international students expect to develop a long-term interpersonal relationship rather than short-term engagement with peers. Interviewees consistently mentioned their willingness to communicate with the non-student residents living in the area, thus the space where they can meet should be taken into account. As it is addressed by the students, a question is raised up: “Whether the student housing can be opened to the other residents living nearby other than the students?”

“Sauna is a good place to meet new people, but I am questioning how many people I can meet in there. There lives around 150 residents in a

student housing, but counting all the residents in one street block, there will be much more people, maybe over 800 people. If there is a place that I can share with 800 people rather than only 150 students, does it mean that I am more likely to make a true friend?"

Given this question, it leads to another topic. At this time, the extent of which a student residential building can be shared to non-student citizens is still unclear because the consequences are unpredictable. The feasibility of allowing the non-students to enter a specific part of the student building and share the facilities is still under discussion. Overall, it may be more viable that students could hold events with the non-student citizens living in the nearby neighborhood. Thus, the social space designed in the student housing may not strongly resonate with international students' aspirations to build interpersonal connections in the scale of a neighborhood. Regarding a stronger community cohesiveness and coherence between the student and non-student residents living in the neighborhood, designers may incorporate a social space in the student housing, which can be shared within the neighborhood.

Studying the resident community in student housing is a significant dimension to understand the value of international students about the feeling of home. In off-campus student housing, the community formed by the student residents are usually temporary communities. Frequent encounters with peers may enhance students' feeling of cohesion and inclusion, which encourages the sense of community or the feeling of home. However, in the urban scale, the majority of the student residential buildings are not located in the areas within educational institutions but across the Metropolitan area of Helsinki. The decentralized locationality of student residence may provide fewer possibilities for the international students to access the potential friends. The geographic distribution of student housing in the city may result in a weak sense of community which may banish the feeling of home. Furthermore, international students wish to build connections with the non-students living in the same neighborhood. As most of the student house is facilitated with sauna and club rooms, these spaces may be shared within the neighborhood. Similarly, students' narratives in the interview rarely include specific references to the outdoor environment in which activities were held; thus, designers may pay more attention to the outdoor public area in

the neighborhood.

4.3.4 Friendship

One of the challenges of moving to a new country is meeting new people. According to the informants, it is notable that a person's social relationship has great effects on the feeling of home. Indeed, it is a frequently mentioned topic among the international students who live in the student housing in the Greater Helsinki. Six international students were selected among the total number of respondents to participate in the interview to share their opinions and personal experiences on the ease or the complexity of developing a friendship. The gender and education level of the informants are carefully categorized to minimize the demographic effects on the research findings. The students who had been living in Helsinki less than a half year have been excluded because the length of their residence may restrict the development of various interpersonal relationships, such as friends and partners. Different social experiences between the married and the unmarried person may also exist; therefore, only unmarried students were invited to join the discussion on friendship formation. Consequently, five masters students and three bachelors students, four of which were male and four were female, entered the interview to discuss the topic of friendship formation. As a result, less than half of the students described their intimate interpersonal relationship, while a few participants mentioned their feeling of loneliness or alienation.

During the interview, students' definitions of friendship or intimate interpersonal relationship are collected. Subsequently, students explained the factors that may attribute to or restrict the formation of friendship based on their own experience. The data collected in the interviews contains four elements: frequent contact, similarities such as common interests, communication skills, and the acceptance of other cultures. It seems that the latter three factors have no ties to spatial design; thus, the discussion on friendship formation in the student housing only concentrates on the subheading—frequent contact.

All the interviewees emphasize the pivotal role of frequent contact for developing an intimate interpersonal relationship, which significantly affects the feeling of

home. It is not difficult to have a passing acquaintance in student dormitories in Helsinki. However, most of the student housing provides the students with few chances of frequent and repeated meetings with specific people, who may become friends in the future.

"I haven't actively searched for friends. I just had a lot of opportunities to frequently meet the same group of people when I smoke downstairs. There is a smoking spot around my building, and lots of people go there for a smoke. I met one of my best friends there because we often met each other when smoking and we talked a lot."

"I play basketball every weekend in the gym. I have developed a friendly relationship with some of the teammates. But even if I believe that I should try to make friends with them, it is impossible to have a longer conversation afterward because we head different directions to home. If we are living close to each other, we can take the same bus back home and have deeper conversations on the way. Basketball is a starting point for friendship, but it is more likely to make a close friend if we can frequently meet outside the gym. Now it feels more like a weekend meeting in the gym rather than a real friendship in my daily life."

It is reasonable to arrange the student housing all over the Metropolitan area, while the geographic separation may lead to less sociable connections in the urban scale. As international students live apart, it takes them more effort to meet with peers and keep the intimate relationship. They may feel isolated or marginalized if they have fewer opportunities to make friends. However, the roommate is another resource of friendship. Several informants mentioned that they rarely contact with roommates, especially the Finnish roommates who have plenty of opportunities to engage with their family, friends, and other social activities. The alienation between roommates banishes the feeling of home.

"My Finnish roommates are never available on the weekends or holidays when it is a good time to hang out and make friends with them. They seldom stay in the apartment because they usually live with their families or friends. They stay with almost the same group of people all the time"

when going to school.”

“Finnish students are not active in building a friendship with roommates. I am living in a shared apartment with two Finnish roommates. It seems that they always keep the door closed and hide in their room. It is rare that we can meet each other in our apartment... I wish that there can be a place in the residential building that forces people to gather together frequently so that it is much easier to make friends for foreign students.”

Besides, the interior setting of student housing also affects the possibilities for friendship formation. In the student housing, space is designed with social purposes such as sauna and club room. However, these public spaces insufficiently facilitate the interconnection and interaction among the residents. The primary factor for the insufficiency is the enclosed atmosphere of these social spaces. Another reason is the inaccessibility of the social area.

“I don’t know whether there is a clubroom in my building. There is no sign of its location or its existence. I guess there should be one because there are some many closed doors in the building. But I don’t know what is behind.”

“It is lucky that the clubroom is next to my apartment because I live on the first floor. To be honest, most of the time in a year, the clubroom is quiet and empty.”

“The rule to use the clubroom in my apartment is to book in advance and get the key from a domain. Sometimes it is impossible to plan the date and the length of stay in advance because you can not always plan or know when you will meet a friend.”

According to the informants, students live in the student housing without free access to the social space. The unoccupied social area such as the clubrooms are closed, and a resident is allowed to use the space only if he or she makes a reservation in advance, which is not user-friendly. Residents should be allowed easy access to all the public space and facilities because the shared space is

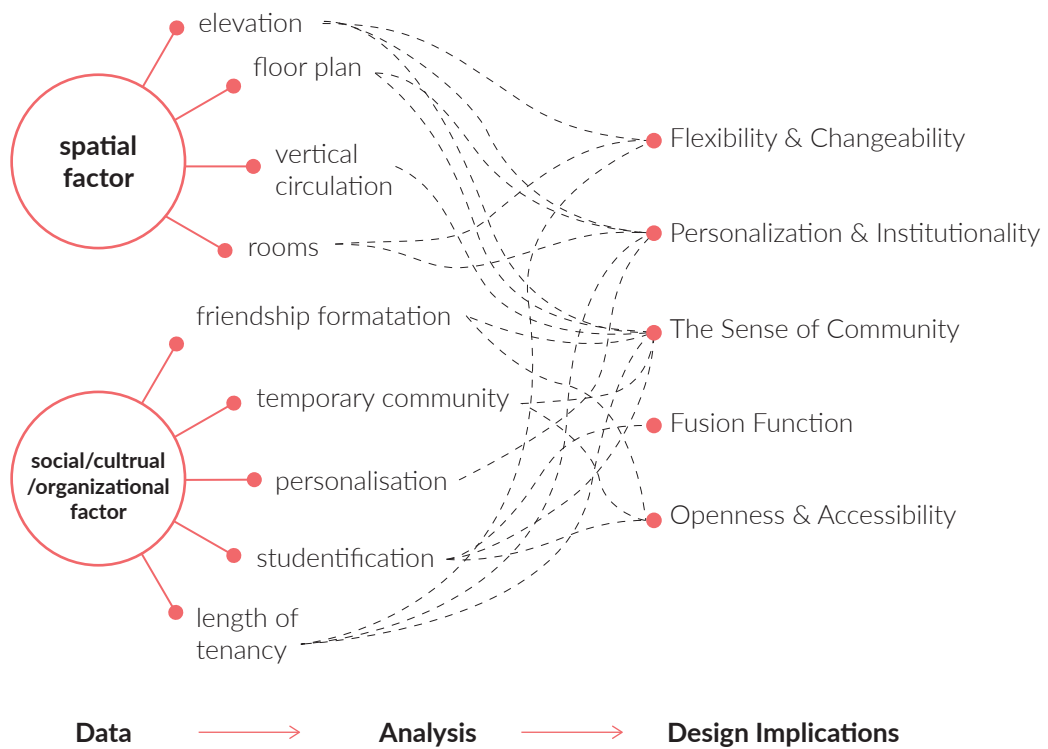
designed for peer gathering.

In conclusion, it is possible to make friends if a person is more open and active, but external factors are also highly influential in the formation of friendship in the student housing. Living in student housing is a promising choice for the international students who want to make friends because residents share a range of commonalities, for instance, the identity of students, interests, and cultural background. However, international students tend to become intimate with peers in situations where less effort is expended to keep regular contact. Since the majority of the student housing is located all over the Greater Helsinki, the geographic dispersion of the student housing may attribute to the social segregation of the students. Furthermore, students wish to have unrestricted access to the social space such as the clubrooms where friendship may be developed. Less social connections with peers and the restricted access to social space can attribute to the feeling of isolation or loneliness rather than the feeling of home.

4.3.5 Demographic factors

Demographic factors including age, gender, nationality, deposit and marital status are tested in the quantitative study. The researcher expected that age, deposit, and marital status probably affect international students' attitudes on student housing. For instance, senior students are more likely to accommodate their expectations of living environment and find a suitable accommodation than the younger students; the married students, especially the ones living with their children, may extend their occupancy in the student housing. However, none of the demographic variables had noticeable evidence to support the findings.

5 . Findings & Implications



5.1 Flexibility and fusion functions

The discussion of the flexible and changeable design of student housing is based on the average length of the tenancy, which is roughly approximate to two years. Student housing is not the one-off construction but is adaptive to alterable purposes and maintenance over time as the residents move in and out, frequently and repeatedly. Universities and Hoas provide students with self-catering accommodation in the Metropolitan area of Helsinki. Usually, the interior is designed for residential purposes including private area, kitchens, storage space, parking lots, laundry rooms, and saunas. Clubrooms, self-planted gardens, and grilling place are set accordingly.

In general, flexibility is a relevant concern in spatial design since students' needs and lifestyle varies frequently and dynamically nowadays. In the Greater Helsinki, some of the student housing is constructed before 1980, while newly built residential buildings are slowly emerging. Rather than paying specific attention to the particular demands of international students, designers instead provide the universal spatial solutions in a manner or a vision of approaching adaptation to different preferences and needs among the residents. However, a pleasant living experience is more than the sense of spaciousness. In consideration to the varying residential needs and a time-limited tenancy, informants denoted that unfurnished apartments may encourage their feeling of home because they can customize the style, the layout, and the function of the room. Even if the empty place might not be convenient for all the residents, it may become a possible approach to engage residents in the creation of their living space, thus generating a personal attachment to the student housing.

During the summer holiday (May to August), more than half of the space and facilities are unused, as plenty of students leave their apartment for the vacation. In the research, many informants made comments on the highly inefficient use of space in the summertime, and they offered many suggestions to improve the situation. The fusion-functioning student housing is the concept that is derived from students' comments and suggestions.

The fusion-functioning space is the "garage" space, where residents can

personalize the area and customize the function. According to the informants, individualizing the space in student housing actively encourages students' feeling of home as they are tightly and individually attached to space. In a larger scale, it refers to the hybrid residential building which combines student apartments and the collaborative "garage" space where students can rent for individual purposes such as a business launch. It is an exceptional design which integrates the space of living, studying, and enterprising. Yazdani Studio has developed the similar concept in the US, while in the Greater Helsinki, designers may incorporate the idea into the residential housing in student villages. It is a practical approach to change the scenery of the "ghost-town," as most of the students leave the student villages for summer holidays. Furthermore, the integrated living-working space may bring more values to students' life. The fusion scope of designing student housing integrates accommodation, personal interests, and creation in fusion-functioning housing, which positively affects students' feeling of home.

5.2 Personalization and institutional design

Although student housing is mostly linked to positive responses in the interviews, such as a sense of safety and permanency, negative emotions can also be related to the spatial design of student housing, which may lead to the absence of feeling free to personalize the space. Meaningful artifacts in the respondents' rooms imply special memories about people, places, and experiences, which enable the dwellers to connect personal stories to the physical space. Students reported that the design of unfurnished rooms offers them independent control over their living environment and accordingly increases the satisfaction. Independent control of the student rooms is considered not only in the capability to arrange and rearrange furniture but also in the choices of including or excluding other people from the personal space. Personalization, with this concern, is the decision to be alone or to engage with others.

Although a majority of the international students wish to create a cozy and individualized living space with furniture and trinkets, sometimes these wishes are not achieved for various reasons. Some students denote their unwillingness of establishing the personal connection with space because they are aware of the temporary residence. The possibilities of personalizing the living environment may

play a significant role in feeling homey in student housing, but international students may not necessarily individualize their rooms, but instead, the public area in the student housing. It is a feasible proposal that students are allowed to arrange and decorate the public space independently or collaboratively.

Besides the personal control over a space, the identity of materials in the public area also affects the experience of residence. As many students live in the same apartment in different periods, durable and aesthetical materials and furniture should be considered. However, the materials such as vinyl floors, white paints, and metal ceilings are labeled as institutional elements which conceal the personalized character of a student residential building. Aesthetic and unique architectural statement of the exterior, especially in the human scale and street level, is also seen as a more personalized and less institutional character of student housing. Simultaneously, the institutional design is embedded in the spatial layout in, for example, symmetrical spatial plans. Students are aware of the symmetrical or linear arrangement of doors in an apartment or doors in the corridor, which shows a substantial identity of the institutional housing and precludes the feeling of personalization.

5.3 Student housing as a community

According to the respondents, international students living in the student housing have less of a feeling of living in a community, which decreases the sense of home. International students rarely have engagement with peer residents or the residents living in the neighborhood. Feeling isolated has a different meaning for the international students because they need to adjust to the unfamiliar environment. The feeling of isolation is not loneliness, but, rather, it is the inadequate opportunities to present who they are and find the communities which they may belong. In addition, as they have limited knowledge of local culture, language, procedures, and habits, the international students may feel estranged and disconnected to peers and the society. Some respondents demonstrate that they are more capable of developing an intimate relationship with co-native students or the residents who share the same mother tongue, which indicates the dominance of language in enhancing the interpersonal interaction. Some students mentioned the inability to live the original lifestyle as they do in the home country, which

results in not only an absence of tradition but also a profound loss of self-identity. However, most of the international students are adaptive and open-minded with capabilities of living the local lifestyle.

The first month of living in student housing is a crucial period with the concern of reducing international students' feeling of alienation and loneliness. Spatial designers may incorporate design strategies which enrich encounter and face-to-face communication. The resident committee can introduce the new dwellers to the peer residents, facilities, and services in the student housing. In the urban scale, gathering student housing in the student villages is a possible approach to encourage the formation of communities. The distance from their apartments to the universities do not necessarily affect students' satisfaction, while the distance to friends' apartments or a particular district is widely concerned among the informants.

Arranging a transitional space between public areas and the private apartments also make a difference. For instance, a balcony access block is a possible approach. Residents have more chances to communicate with neighbors and passersby in the balcony corridor, which may enhance the feeling of community. Another practical approach is to arrange an anteroom in the front-door space between adjacent flats so that private apartments are separated from public space. The anteroom can be shared and decorated by a group of residents living in different apartments, which may lead to tighter neighborly relations.

At the room scale, most of the international students are satisfied with the single-occupancy living space in the student housing. International students expect to have intimate interactions with the roommates, who are the primary sources of interpersonal connection. However, they mention that the frequency of meeting and contacting roommates is deliberately avoided irrespective of spatial planning. The informants reported that the distance between doors could be an encouragement or discouragement of the sense of community. Additionally, the number of doors in space may decrease the willingness of communication; therefore, translucent materials and archway can be the alternatives.

Since the opportunities of communication are intentionally restricted in private

apartments, greater possibilities for various interactions are accepted in common areas such as lounges, club rooms, corridors, and rooftops. Designers may apply the flat roof to student housing and carefully arrange the space beneath and above the rooftop because it can become a prospective public space for recreation such as gardening, chilling or grilling. It has promising possibilities for peer communication and social interaction among residents. Besides, the location of common areas and public facilities should be carefully arranged on different floors to increase the vertical circulation in a residential building and create opportunities for the encounter. Thus, the spatial planning may provide international students with the potentials for engagement and communication.

5.4 Openness and accessibility

International students are demanding in the sense of needing to become familiar with the new living environment quickly. In the research, many students elaborate that the secret space and invisible facilities in student housing enhance their feeling of being excluded rather than encourage their feeling of home. Given the importance of equitable and open access to space and facilities in student housing, the explicit visual instructions may be considered in the future design. When planning the neighborhood and arranging the interior space, the design concept should have more flattening characteristics. Moreover, designers may apply more translucent materials in the public area concerning the visibility.

Likewise, the orientation of approaching public facilities, such as the club room in student housing, is to reserve a time in advance and get a key as the permission of entry. Some students complain that this booking system discourages the unexpected circumstances and precludes the unscheduled accessibility. Designers, together with the housing provider, should pay attention to how students wish to use the social space. Furthermore, in the building scale, designers may reconsider the design of balconies and rooftops. A practical approach is to arrange sharing platforms as the substitution of private balconies.

In the neighborhood scale, the possible action is to create a friendly atmosphere for sharing information within the neighborhood. Commonly, in the student housing, there are indoor spaces for posting scheduled activities, advertisements,

and notifications. Such information can be shared with non-student residents in the neighborhood. Except for the concern of an easily-accessible method for sharing information, the informants also suggest sharing the social spaces and public to the dwellers in the neighborhood. Regardless of whether information, space, or facilities can be shared within the neighborhood, it is built upon the agreement and willingness of all the student residents. Additionally, the idea of sharing should not only include the unilateral flow of messages from students to the surrounding neighbors, but should be approached as an exchange of information in the neighborhood.

6 . Conclusion

This qualitative study has explored the feeling of home under the heading of international students' living experiences in student housing in the Greater Helsinki. The study demonstrated how international students perceive the space in student housing and their attitudes on the non-spatial settings through the application of urban hitchhiking, semi-structured interview, graffiti wall, and behavioral mapping. The spatial design of the student housing is examined from the perspectives of facades, six types of floor plans, vertical circulations, rooms, and public facilities, which had indicated less institutional characteristics but more open concepts. The narrative of international students' life includes the length of residence, the establishment of friendship, the connection with communities in the neighborhood, and the process of studentification, which are analyzed in different geometric scales. At the same time, it is essential to review the relevant design projects and theoretical works rather than merely approaching the topic with the empirical data. Thematic ideas are coded through benchmarking and literature review, which is used as a framework to cluster data and derive conclusions from qualitative analysis.

This research has provided specific knowledge of international students' demands, preferences, and satisfaction of the student accommodation. It also manifested the ways in which student housing affects international students' feeling of home through spatial, social, cultural, and organizational factors and are important in answering whether, why, when, and how the feeling of home is achieved. The outcome of the research is presented with texts and illustrations to demonstrate how international students perceive the space in student housing and their attitudes on the non-spatial settings. Conclusively, this research addressed four practical approaches for designers who are dedicated to create an enjoyable living environment for university students.

Institutions which recruit international students should ensure that the living environment is promising in order to retain these students. However, as in many design projects, there is a trade-off involved; in the design of student housing, the trade-off is between the particular needs of international students and the concerns of housing providers such as the universities and Hoas. It is a misunderstanding that international students share the same demands and preferences as Finnish students, as even Finnish students have various aspirations.

International students' expectations of student housing is not only about getting accommodation. In the beginning, international students' expectations for their accommodations is unclear because their primary concern is to settle down in the new environment; their intense longing for information, local knowledge, and interpersonal connection is embedded in the student housing. The adaptability to a new place and the possibility of social interaction are considered important to encourage the feeling of home even within a short-time stay. As the familiarity of the new place increases, international students become more independent and more willing to make the temporary accommodation into a meaningful home. At the same time, they are eager to the feeling of inclusion. They have strong aspirations of the feeling of integration; thus, they actively search for opportunities to build interpersonal connection with not only the peers but also the non-student residents. The international students in this research also define student housing as a place that should reflect personal identity, which can be achieved through personalizing the space. In student housing, the feeling of home is similar to the sense of belonging to the residential-based community. The belongingness is not simply the specific demand of the foreign students, but also a powerful source which contribute greatly to the sense of self. The self-identity in the new environment is achieved by answering the question: "Which groups do I belong to?"

A pleasant living environment is also linked to the building itself. Even though the overall satisfaction among the international students is high, the interior space may not represent the most preferred characteristics. Designers should include less institutional designs but flattening characteristics in the design. Moreover, the spatial intervention can encourage the encounter and communication not only within the student housing but also in the neighborhood. Fusion-functioning residential buildings are considered as future trend, which combines the possibilities of dwelling, learning and enterprising.

Further research could be implemented with a larger group of subjects to enrich the qualitative evidence on the topic. Studying more samples also makes contribution to a clearer understanding of how international students prioritize the attributes and which types of student housing is preferable to them. The limited amount of subjects may restrict the demographic findings. More data can be

collected from large amount of international students from different institutions, which helps to have a better understanding of the relationship between university students and their living environments in the Metropolitan area.

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